The Indigenous Languages of the Melbourne area:
sources and challenges
Stephen Morey
Centre for Research on Language Diversity
La Trobe University
s.morey@latrobe.edu.au

Map from Blake, Barry J. and Julie Reid. 1998. 'Classifying Victorian Languages' in Blake BJ (ed) 1998. *Wathawurrung Language and the Colac Language of Southern Victoria.* Canberra: Pacific Linguistics. 1-58
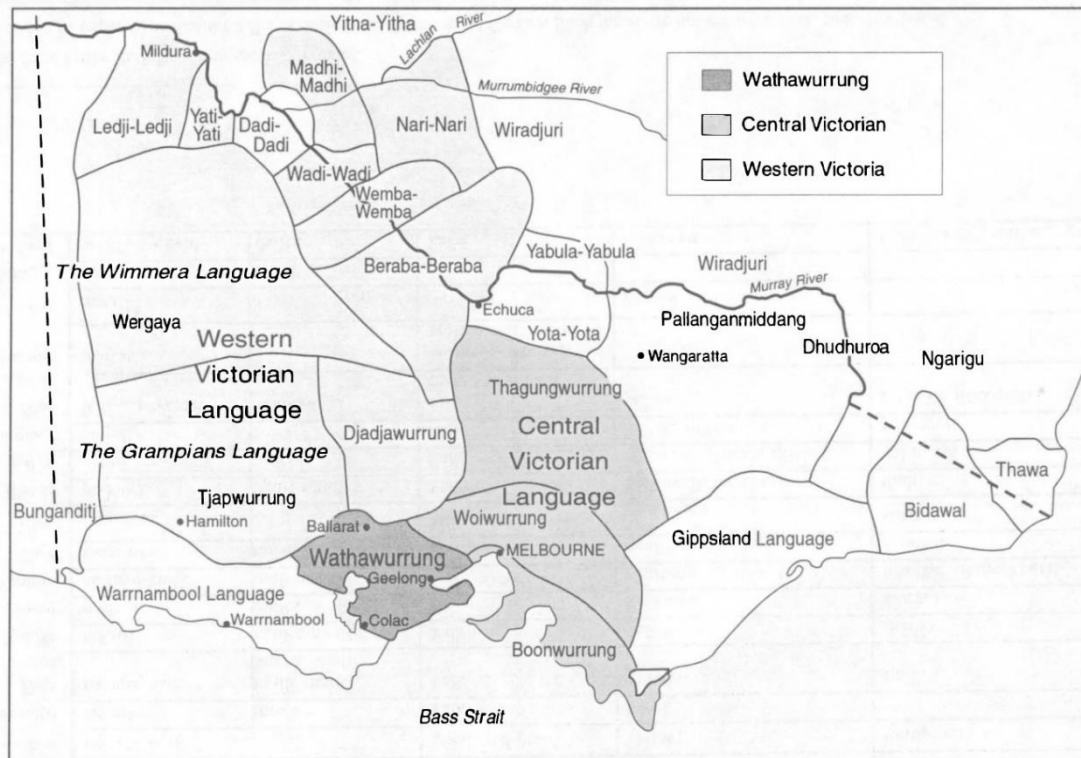
MAP 1: APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF VICTORIAN LANGUAGES

Language names:
Boonwurrung: a plethora of spellings:

> Boonurong, Boonwerong, Boonurrong, Boonoorong, Boonoorung, Boonwurrong, Boonoor-ong, Boon-oor-rong, Boongerong, Bunwurung, Boonworong, Boonwerong, Bonurong, Bonourong, Bunuron, Bunwurru.

These seem to consist of two forms **bun** and **wurrung**, the latter meaning 'lips, extended meaning: language'

Woiwurrung is similarly spelled in multiple ways:

> Woiworung, Woiwurung, Woiwurong, Woiwurrong, Warowang, Woëworung, Wooeewoorong, Warorong, Woororong, Warerong, Wawoo-rong, Wawoorong, Waworong, Waworung, Wauerong, Wowerong, Wawurong, Wawurrong, Wavoorong, Woiwurru, Wairwaioo, Warwaroo, Wainworra

Major sources for the languages of Central Victoria

John Green. Superintendent of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station from 1863 to 1874. He wrote a description of the language of the 'Yarra Tribe' consisting of a vocabulary, sentences and some grammatical information. Published in Brough Smyth (1878 11:99-115). Also a list of 68 native plants with Aboriginal equivalents (170-72). The plant list is partly the work of Mrs Green.

Luise Hercus (1926-2018). Her 1986 book contains a couple of pages of 'phonetic notes' on ˈWoiwurru' and a vocabulary based on the pronunciation of about 90 words by people originally from Corranderrk.

Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841-1908) was a surveyor who published extensively on Aboriginal languages and customs from 1892 to 1917. He wrote many things, including a sketch of the inflectional system in manuscript and published versions entitled 'The Thaguwurru Language'. And two manuscripts illustrating inflection, one entitled 'Yarra Language' and the other 'Woiwurru' . There were a number of published pieces.

George Augustus Robinson (1788-1866) was the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District from 1839 to 1849. He left notebooks full of language information.

William Thomas (1793-1867) Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of the Western Port district. In Brough Smyth 1878, there is a *Succinct Sketch of the Aboriginal Language* by Thomas. There are also large numbers of manuscripts in the Mitchell Library (State Library of New South Wales) and State Library of Victoria

Sample: R.H. Mathews Notebook 1 p5 (NLA MS 8006/3/4)
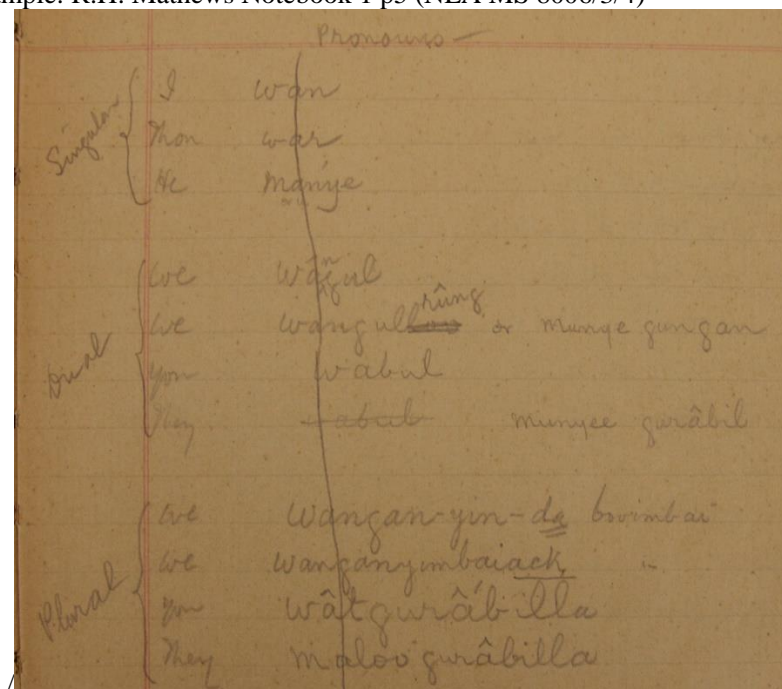
Pronouns
(Singular)
I   wan
Thou   war
He   munye

(Dual)
We   wangul
We   wangullûng hur
or munye gungan
You   wabul
They   wabul munyee gurâbil

(Plural)
We   wangan-yin-da booimbai
We   wanganyimbaiack
You   wâtgurâˈbilla
They   maloogurâbilla

Pronoun system in R.H. Mathews 1902 article

	Singular.		
1st Person	I,	Wan	Mine, Nugalik
2nd ,,	Thou,	War	Thine, Nugalin
3rd ,,	He,	Munyi	His, Nugalo
	Dual.		
1st Person	We, incl.,	Wangŭl	Ours, incl., Nugalngul
	We, excl.,	Wangŭn	Ours, excl., Nugalngun
2nd ,,	You,	Wabûl	Yours, Nugalbul
3rd ,,	They,	Munyibulabil	Theirs, Nugalobullain

The Sound System of the Languages

Tentative list of consonants in Woiwurrung (based on Hercus 1986: 160)

bilabial	dental	alveolar	retroflex	palatal	velar
b (p)	**dh (th)**	**d (t)**	**rd (rt)**	**dy (tj, ty)**	**g (k)**
m	**nh**	**n**	**rn**	**ny**	**ng**
		rr	**r**		
		l	**rl**		
w				**y**	

Tenative list of vowels (based on Hercus 1986: 160)
Three clear vowel distinctions and maybe two more:

      i   **u**
    (e)   **(o)**
        a

But what do we make of the records of the word for 'man'?

koolein, kolin, koolin (Green), *gulin, kulindhak* (Mathews), *koo-lin* (Thomas), *cooleenth* (Bunce), *coling* (McCrae), *ko.leen* (Robinson) (the word was not recorded by Luise Hercus)

Barry Blake in his 1991 study of the language made a regularized spelling of this word as **guliny (guliñ)**, suggesting the final sound was a palatal sound. Bunce's spelling would suggest a final dental nasal **gulinh**.

So an important part of the process of analysis is to compare forms and come up with a 'regular' spelling. We could choose voiced or voiceless consonants and a range of other symbols to represent this. We cannot always come up with a clear answer:

Corpse	*Werrgabil*	**werrga** or **wiyaga**	'die'	**-bil** 'having?"
Costive	*Balert-tak*	**bale(r)t**	'hard'	**-d(h)ak** '?'
Cramp	*Jennaboorre*	**djinang**	'foot'	
Cramp	*Jennaboorre*	**burri**	'?'	
Crane	*Karween* (the first man)	**ga(rr)winy**	'PROPER NAME'	
Faint-hearted	*Bambun*	**bamba**	'fear'	**-uny** '3SG'

Samples of regularization and grammatical analysis:

(1)   *Now, women, sit down*
         Ngallamby-wŏt—badgirk
         ngalamb(a)-i-wat   **bagurrk**
         sit-IMP-2PL   woman
       'Sit down, women!'

(2)   *koolin   ngargunner   borundut*
         Blackfellows' corrobboree to-night
         guliny   ngarrga-nharr   burroyn-d-uth
         person   dance-2SG   night-LOC
       'Blackfellow, you are dancing tonight.'

Grammar

<u>Possession:</u>

From this we can recover a system of suffixes:

ABLE 3.5 *Possessor suffixes*

	singular	dual	plural
1 inc.		**-ngal**	**-nganyin**
1 exc.	**-ik**	**-ngan**	**-nganyinyu**
2	**-in**	**-mbul**	**-ngut**
3	**-u**	**-bulany (-bulañ)**	**-dhan**

So here's a set of nouns:
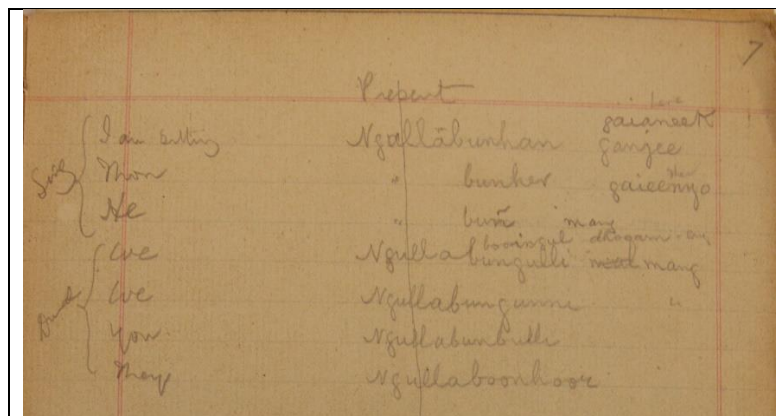
      nyilang 'bone'
      banggany 'elder brother'
      wangga 'cheek'
      gawang 'head'

Verbs

Present		
I am sitting	ngullābunhan	gaianeek here
Thou	" bunher	ganjee
He	" buñ	gaieenyoo
Dual		
We	ngallambungulli mang	
	(booingul dhooarn)	
We	ngullabungunnu	
You	ngullabunbulli	
They	ngullabunhoor	

Barry Blake's paradigm (where <u> means **u** as in Italian *tutti* 'all', like English *oo*)

                                      e

sing.	1	**djilbunhan** 'hit, kill'	**ngalabunhan** 'remain, live dwell'
	2	**djilbunharr**	**ngalabunharr**
	3	**djilbuñ**	**ngalabuñ**
du	1 inc	**djilbungal**	**ngalabungal(i)**
	1 ex	**djilbungan**	**ngalabungan(i)**
	2	**djilbuñbul**	**ngalabuñbul(i)**
	3	**djilbuñbulañ**	**ngalabuñbulañ**

So what might we do with these roots

      gunga 'take'; **wunga** 'give', **yana** 'go, walk'

Place Names

Modern Name	Re-spelled	Meaning
Wonthaggi	**wandha-dji**	'take (it!)'
Leongatha	**liyang-adha**	'our teeth'
Woori Yallock	**wurr(i)-yaluk**	'big creek'
Prahran / Birrarung /	**b(a)rrarran(g)**	'name of the Yarra river'
Yannathan	**yana-dhan**	'you (sg) did go'
Murrumbeena	**marrambinharr**	'you singular, your body'

John Green's list: (in Smyth 1878 II: 99)

YARRA TRIBE.

The following vocabulary of the language of the tribe of Aborigines inhabiting the River Yarra, and a few short sentences in the native tongue, with translations, were compiled by Mr. John Green, the Inspector of Aboriginal Stations in Victoria.

English.	Native.		English.	Native.
Abandon	*Waltan'i.*		Barefoot	*Yearrnjenong.*
Abate	*Wykrook.*		Bashful	*Wiling-jek.*
Abdomen	*Boojin.*		Bat	*Boléang.*
Abed	*Karenboon.*		Battle	*Jelpchering.*
Abhor	*Booang.*		Bawl	*Marr-roong.*
Ability	*Balet'tak.*		Beak	*Bargimboon.*
Abject	*Nulim.*		Beard	*Ngarrin.*
Able	*Kyinandoo.*		Beat	*Tingkurtini.*
Ablution	*Karwarboun.*		Bee	*Manerlong.*
Abolish	*Meleemak.*		Beef	*Bulgana.*
Abominable	*Booang.*		Begone	*Yane-toee.*
Abortion	*Nitprang'i.*		Belong	*Noogal.*
About (near)	*Kyn'oo.*		Bewail	*Marroen.*
Above	*Koov-ee.*		Beyond	*Kaberring.*
Absent (in mind)	*Abenden ngargit.*		Birds	*Queep-queep.*
Absent (not here)	*Yani'iak.*		Birth	*Tongherang'i.*

Rectify *Burdup-tâgo-konga-din*

     bu(r)ndap   **dhagu**   **gunga-dhan**
     good   neg   take-1sg.pst
     'I took (what was) not good'

Unfair   *Ngaboon-noon-koorreen*
     ngabun-uny   **gurri-ang**
     neg-3sg   be-pres.part
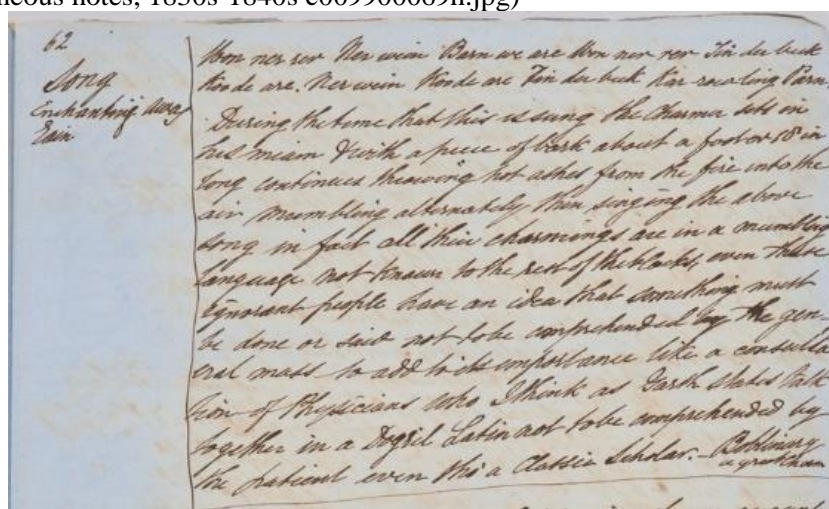   'He is not being / doing (it)'

Uneaten *Nga-be-din-tangerr-bi*
     ngabu-dhan   **dhanga-rra-bi**
     neg-1sg.past   eat-?-?
     'I did not eat (it all up?}'

Absent (in mind) *Abenden ngargit*
     ngabun-dhan   **ngarr(n)ga-ity?**
     neg-1sg.pst   hear-?
     literally meaning 'I did not hear it'

Note that the verb agreement is occurring on the negative marker. Luise Hercus (1986) called this an example of transference

The head-word is the most strongly accented and important part of a sentence and the subject marker is normally transferred from the verb to it . Words of class 2 will therefore be called 'transferring words'. (1986:50)

William Thomas (Mitchell Library MS 214, Volume 03 Item 01 William Thomas journal, October-November 1841, and miscellaneous notes, 1830s-1840s c009900069h.jpg)

62 Song enchanting away rain	Won ner rer Ner wein Barn we are Won ner rer Tin der buk Koo de are. Ner wein Koo de are Tin der buk Kar-row-long Parn During the time this is sung the charmer sits in his miam & with a piece of bark about a foot on 10 in long continues throwing hot ashes from the fire into the air mumbling alternately then singing the above song in fact all their charmings are in a mumbling language not known to the rest of the blacks, even those ignorant people have an idea that something must be done or said not to be comprehended by the general mass to add to its importance like a consultation of Physiciains who I think as Garth states talk together in a Dogril Latin not te comprehended by the patient even tho' a classis scholar - Bobbinary a great charm

Thomas in Bride (1898: 92) "*We have in the Western Port tribe a celebrated charmer-away of rain, old Bobbinary. I have known this man to be kept singing for hours. The blacks say, when Bobbinary was a child that it had been raining for some days, and " blackfellows all sad, their bellies tied up to keep off hunger ; that the child Bobbinary began to sing, and that sun immediately came out, and no more rain. That ever since then he has been able to send rain away.*"

(3) *won ner rer*   *ner wein*
     wan(h)a-rra   **ngawany**
     look-up-having?   sun
     'Looking far up ... at the sun.''

     barn we are   *won ner rer*   *tin der bak*   *koo de are*
     baany-arr   **wan(h)a-rra**   **dindi-bak**   **gurri-aya**
     water-?   look-up-having?   finished-?   be?-?
     'Looking far up, the rain is finished ...'

     ner wein   *koo de are*   *tin der buk*   *kar-row-long*   *(parn)*
     ngawany   **gurri-aya**   **dindi-bak**   **garr(g)aling**   **baany**
     sun   be?-?   finished-?   wet   water
     'The sun (has) come wetness is finished ...'

- Thomas records two words *Wonnunarta* 'there above, look up' and *Wonnunduk* 'look above, very high'.
- The word *barm-we-are* is perhaps based on the root **baany-** 'water' and refers to rain.' The most frequently recorded word for rain in this language is **baanymabil**. Could the form of this word actually be **baanywiya**?
- The word *tin-der-bak* is recorded by Thomas as *Tindeebeek* with the meaning 'all gone'
- The word *Koo-ding* is recorded by Thomas with the meaning 'in or at' (MS 214/23 Book B). This is possible a form of the root **gurri** 'be' (Blake 1991: 76)
- The word *Kar-row-lin* / *Kar-row-long* is spelled *Karrgaling* 'wet (rainy, moist)' (Green in Smyth II: 107). We have decided to regularize this as **garr(g)aling**.